

Filed for intro on 01/31/2000

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 568
By Harper

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend Dr. Dorothy Lazinia Brown, the first African American female surgeon in the Southeastern United States, on the occasion of her retirement.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the elected representatives of the state of Tennessee should pause to pay tribute to its own, those individuals from its rank and file whose works elevate them to almost mythic proportions, earning them legendary status during their lifetime; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Dorothy Brown is one such remarkable woman who undoubtedly deserves the reverence, respect and special commendation of this body; and

WHEREAS, she will be retiring on January 31, 2000; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Brown spent the first thirteen years of her childhood in an orphanage in Troy, New York; she states, "I grew up at a time when people said Black kids couldn't learn because they're dull and stupid"; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Brown also became the first Black woman elected to the Tennessee General Assembly, serving in the House of Representatives from 1966-1968; and

WHEREAS, a true visionary, who is firm in her convictions, Dr. Brown never shied away from bringing the tough issues to the table; and

SJR0568

01010783

WHEREAS, Dr. Brown risked popularity, and ultimately raised the public conscience on issues that are just being discussed with some frequency in modern times, which demonstrates that this lady has always been at least thirty years ahead of everyone else in her thinking and her capabilities; and

WHEREAS, growing up an orphan, and disadvantaged, did not stop Dr. Brown from achieving her goals to become a physician and legislator; and

WHEREAS, during her illustrious tenure in the House of Representatives, Dr. Brown sponsored House Bill No. 930, establishing insanity as a new grounds for divorce; and House Bill No. 1288, which established a penalty for unauthorized and certain authorized abortion; regarding her controversial legislation, she stated, "You would have thought that I'd opened the gates of hell...People say the abortion thing didn't have a thing to do with it [her unsuccessful bid for a state Senate seat in 1968], but I think differently. I don't think the people of Tennessee have forgiven me yet."; and

WHEREAS, she also was instrumental in co-sponsoring legislation to celebrate Negro History Week in Tennessee, which has evolved into the nationally celebrated Black History Month of February; in her own words, " the designation of the original week was important to recognize achievements and contributions by black Americans and to combat racism"; and

WHEREAS, the successful career of this legendary icon, who is nationally respected by the African American community, began with the completion of her undergraduate degree at the historically black Bennett College, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1941, on a four-year scholarship; she then earned her medical degree from Meharry Medical College in 1948, and later worked there, and was honored by that fine institution by having a women's dormitory named in her honor; she worked at Meharry after completing her internship at Harlem Hospital in New York City from 1948-49; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Brown first decided to become a physician at the age of five, inspired by her experience during a tonsillectomy; after being rejected for a surgical residency at Harlem

Hospital during a time in American history where women were not allowed into surgical residencies, she, no stranger to struggle, returned to Meharry, and convinced Dr. Matthew Walker, the chief of surgery, and another African American legendary hero, to accept her into the surgical residency program there; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Brown said of Dr. Walker, "Dr. Matthew Walker was a brave man," because despite advice from his staff that a woman couldn't withstand the rigors of surgery, he accepted her into the program; she further stated, "I worked so hard, the other fellows called me 'Mule Brown' because I was definitely not going to fail"; and

WHEREAS, a devoted Christian, whose deeds have always been done without any personal agenda or desire for recognition, Dr. Dorothy Brown has received over 90 honors during her lifetime, including Outstanding Achievement Award-Golden Anniversary from Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated in 1963, Outstanding Service to Mankind from the Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority in Jackson, Tennessee in 1978, and has received Proclamations declaring "Dr. Dorothy L. Brown Day" in Detroit, Troy, New York, and by the Citizens of Metropolitan Nashville and Friendship Baptist Church in 1986; and

WHEREAS, a soror of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, which boasts an esteemed group of other accomplished, nationally recognized, ground-breaking African-American women, Dr. Brown epitomizes the strong, black woman, who *repeatedly* achieved the impossible simply because it never occurred to her that she could not do so;

WHEREAS, she is the perfect example of a person whose life exemplifies the Ghanaian Symbol *Gyenamae*, which means, "I will fear no one but God"; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That we hereby honor and commend Dr. Dorothy Lazine Brown, the quintessential Renaissance woman, not only for her remarkable career as the Southeast's first African-American woman surgeon, but also for the difficult duties she so graciously performed

during her term as a legislator in the Tennessee General Assembly in the late 1960s, extending to her our heartfelt thanks for her august service to the people of Tennessee.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.